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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 MANAMA 001394

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [BA](#)

SUBJECT: KING SHUFFLES CABINET; NEW FOREIGN MINISTER NAMED

REF: MANAMA 1375

Classified By: Ambassador William T. Monroe for reasons 1.4 (b) (d)

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Summary  
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11. (C) A royal decree issued September 26 shuffled the Cabinet and, as expected, named Shaikh Khalid bin Ahmed Al Khalifa, Bahrain's current Ambassador to the U.K., the new Minister of Foreign Affairs. Although there had been speculation that Minister of Information/Minister of State for Foreign Affairs Abdul Ghaffar would lose his MFA portfolio, he in fact continues to retain both jobs. Outgoing FM Shaikh Mohammed will retain his Deputy PM position, and an additional DPM slot has been created for the PM's son Shaikh Ali (who remains as Minister of Transportation). The decree established a National Authority for Oil and Gas, which replaces the Ministry of Oil. Outgoing Minister of Oil Shaikh Isa, closely aligned to the PM, was bumped up to the PM's office as Advisor on Oil and Industry Affairs. The new oil/gas authority will be headed by former Minister for Cabinet Affairs and Tender Board Chairman Dr. Abdul Hussain Ali Mirza. The head of the Bahrain National Security Agency (BNSA) Shaikh Abdul Aziz Al Khalifa was shifted over to the PM's office as Advisor for Security Affairs. He will be replaced by current BNSA Deputy and former Ambassador to the U.S. Shaikh Khalifa bin Ali Al Khalifa. In line with the Cabinet shuffle last January, this latest move appears to be part of the King's gradual effort to move some of the old guard out (most notably Shaikh Mohammed and Shaikh Isa), and also chip away at the Prime Minister's control over ministries. USG interests should be well served. There is already talk of further Cabinet changes in 2006.

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New Face at the Foreign Ministry  
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12. (SBU) The King issued a decree September 26 that shuffled the cabinet and, as expected (reftel), named Shaikh Khalid bin Ahmed Al Khalifa, Bahrain's Ambassador to the U.K., the new Minister of Foreign Affairs. Shaikh Khalid was expected to return to Bahrain September 27 and, with the other new Ministers, be sworn into his new position on September 28. Outgoing Foreign Minister Shaikh Mohammed bin Mubarak Al Khalifa will retain his Deputy Prime Minister position, which has now been redesignated as Deputy Prime Minister for Ministerial Committees. Although there had been suggestions that Minister of State for Foreign Affairs Dr. Mohammed Abdul Ghaffar, overburdened since January when he picked up the additional portfolio of Minister of Information, would lose his MFA slot, that change did not occur and he apparently will remain dual-hatted.

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Changes at Oil, Not at Transportation  
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13. (SBU) Prior to the formal announcement, there had been speculation of changes at both Oil and Transportation in anticipation that their component parts would move towards more independent authorities. A change did take place at Oil, where long-serving Minister Shaikh Isa was bumped up to the Prime Minister's Office as an advisor on oil and energy. The Ministry of Oil was converted into a National Authority for Oil and Gas, to be headed by current Minister for Cabinet Affairs and Tender Board Chairman Dr. Abdul Hussain Ali Mirza, a well respected technocrat who spent 22 years on the executive board at Bahrain's oil company BAPCO, and before that worked at Caltex. The new Minister for Cabinet Affairs is Shaikh Ahmed bin Atiyatallah Al Khalifa, currently President of the Central Informatics Office. At Transportation, Shaikh Ali bin Khalifa Al Khalifa, a son of the Prime Minister, retained his position as Minister and was given the additional title of Deputy Prime Minister (one of three, along with Shaikh Mohammed and Minister of Islamic Affairs Shaikh Abdulla).

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New Face at National Security Agency  
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14. (SBU) An unexpected change, that only surfaced one day

before the announcement, was the replacement of Bahrain National Security Agency head Shaikh Abdul Aziz bin Atiyatallah Al Khalifa with Shaikh Khalifa bin Ali Al Khalifa, former Ambassador to the U.S. who returned to Bahrain late last year to take up a position as Deputy at BNSA. There had been speculation September 25 that BNSA would be merged into the Ministry of Interior, but the September 26 decree did not address that point. Shaikh Abdul Aziz told us that he will move to his new position as Advisor to the PM on National Security October 1.

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Comment: A Step Forward

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15. (C) The Cabinet shuffle last January saw key cronies of the Prime Minister such as Abdulla Seif, Mohammed Mutawa, and Abdel Nabi Shoala moved out of the cabinet and into positions as advisors to the Prime Minister. This was viewed as part of the King's effort to gradually ease out long-term members of the Cabinet loyal to the PM. At the time, there had been speculation that Minister of Oil Shaikh Isa, a brother-in-law of the PM, would also be moved out. That proved a bridge too far in January, but not this time, and Shaikh Isa now joins the growing crowd of advisors around the PM. The elevation of the PM's son to a Deputy Prime Minister position may have been a part of the bargaining process. Outgoing BNSA head Shaikh Abdul Aziz was also considered closer to the PM than the King or CP; he too is now an advisor to the PM. Although one Embassy contact expressed concern that the Prime Minister was building a second seat of government around his office, in fact it does appear that his power is being chipped away as younger officials take charge of cabinet ministries (although it is still too early to discount the PM's power).

16. (C) Regarding USG interests, we should be well served. As reported reftel, the new Foreign Minister is a U.S. college graduate, served at the Bahrain Embassy in Washington, and is expected to bring a more "modern" outlook to the MFA. The new head of BNSA served in Washington for close to 10 years, first as defense Attache and then as Ambassador. On counterterrorism, he clearly understands the U.S. perspective and, whether or not BNSA eventually folds into the Ministry of Interior, he can be expected to work well and closely with Minister of Interior Shaikh Rashid. And Ali Mirza at Oil and Gas seems a smart choice as Bahrain tries to move away from state-controlled enterprises.

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